

## Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2015 AM Come dine with me – John 12v1-11

**Title: Come dine with me - John 12v1-11**

**Purpose:** To notice three tell-tale signs of what a true Christian will display: Work, worship & witness.

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### Come dine with me

I want you to figure out what I'm talking about.

I'm going to give you 7 clues – when you think you know what it is (well just sit on your hands):

- OK - It's very popular
- It's been going 10 years now
- There's a £1,000 prize to be fought for
- It involves a week long party
- It includes a group of five strangers
- It is directed by a voice over artist – who keeps the action under control
- Lastly - food is very central to the whole thing

Q. Anybody know what this is yet?

Well – it's not Masterchef – BUT IT IS: "Come dine with me" – and David Lamb is the voice over artist

Each one of the 5 contestants are amateur chefs and they have to compete for title of the ultimate dinner party host. Though the week each one will stage a dinner party for the others and they will each be judged by the other guests on whatever criteria they decide upon – the quality of the food, for example, could be one possible factor.

At the end of the week, the competitor with the highest score wins the £1,000.

By the end of the last party, each competitor will have got to know their fellow party hosts a lot better AND

**SOME - MAY BECOME FRIENDS FOR LIFE,**

**WHILE OTHERS - MAY COME TO WISH THEY HAD NEVER MET.**

#### What each will bring to the table

This morning we are going to be looking carefully at three different candidates, at three of those present at the meal, and we will see what SPECIAL INGREDIENT each are going to BRING TO THE TABLE.

And we'll be able to stand back and judge what they bring.

#### Where just two or three come together

The way this story in John 12 begins, sets the scene as one very convivial dinner party.

This party, as we shall soon see, has all the ingredients that will make for an occasion that will long be remember by all those present.

The opening scene here described in Verse 2 is very homely:

“Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary etc. etc.”

So these are our 3 hosts who will all bring something unique by way of HONOURING Jesus:

**Martha, Lazarus** and then **Mary**.

Where 2 or 3 come together

I confess that that opening verse did remind me of a precious little truth from:

**Matthew 18 Verse 20** “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

That we do not need to engage in elaborate rituals, meet in ornate cathedrals or jump through any other hoops in order to enjoy glorious and wonderful and freeing worship of the Lord Jesus with Him there right in the centre of things.

How easy for us to lose sight, sometimes, of the very simplicity of Christianity.

Now one thing that is not made clear in regards to this party setting is who the actual host is. Had it been in Martha’s house (Like it was in **Luke 10** in another event that involved these sisters) then we might well have assumed that she was the senior sister and that she was the host, however, the Matthew and Mark parallel accounts of this meal tell us that the house in question belonged (or at least had belonged) to Simon the Leper.

So we’ll work through this account and see what each of our three characters uniquely bring to the table. So **#1** then:

## 1] Martha

Q. I wonder what was in Martha’s mind as she comes to this party with Jesus?

Perhaps we can make our first tentative steps in answering this by perhaps looking at an earlier episode in Martha’s life.

This close-knit family of **Martha, Mary** and **Lazarus** comes up just two sections of Scripture (at least in a named way) – these are in **Luke 10** and then in **John chapters 11 & 12**. Putting those together we have essentially 3 accounts:

- we have the death and subsequent resurrection of Lazarus – and that is **John 11**
- we have the account that then follows on in **John 12** – which is what we are looking at this morning
- and then there is one other in **Luke 10** which has quite a bit of overlap with our passage

Luke 10 passage

Now because that passage is quite short let me read it to you:

**Luke 10 verses 38-42** “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, **“Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”**

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

### A rather similar setting

No I suspect that the similarity of the setting would not have been missed by Martha – partly because we read that she is doing the same thing – she is the one who is SERVING, she is the WORKER.

Maybe she remembers her own exasperated words to the Lord from the last time:

**“Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”**

Let me ask you – Q. Have you ever had a bit of a “pity party” over some bit of service that you were doing in the church?

Have you ever said to yourself → Q. So why am I the only one that DOT DOT DOT?

Have you ever said to yourself → Q. So where is everybody else when there’s:

- **coffee cups** to be washed up
- **chairs** to be stacked
- the **banner** needs to be taken down
- the **floor** needs sweeping up
- the **money** has to be counted and paid into the bank etc. etc. etc.?

### The task was the main thing

Before, Jesus could see that Martha was distracted and troubled by all the tasks that were on her to-do list.

She was hot & bothered, she was not enjoying her service, her attitude was all wrong.

Last time around the keywords for Martha were:

- DUTY – I have to do this for Jesus and the others
- OBLIGATION – I ought to get everything prepared and out on the table
- CHORE – this is not exactly my idea of fun, frankly this is just one big BURDEN

### Now things were different

We know that things have changed now because Martha has just as many people to cater for. In fact the occasion is perhaps a bit grander (the NIV suggests that this is an occasion intended to honour Jesus for his resurrecting Lazarus back to life). However this time we see:

- no hint of complaint
- no sense of her service being rather grudging

### Old man washing the floor

The story is told of an old man who helped to run an old mission hall. He wanted to preach but he had no gift for it. In fact, in earlier years he had himself helped to open up this church.

Well this man used to go down to the church on a Saturday afternoon after his office closed and he would roll up his trousers, take a bucket of water and brush and clean down the chairs and scrub the floor.

Now no-one else in the church was aware of what this man did. Well that was until one day when some of the younger folk came down to get some song books and just as they opened the door they saw the old man down on his knees scrubbing the floor.

So they threw their hands up in the air saying “We never knew you were doing this – you must not do this! We will scrub the floor.”

But the old man said to them “Oh – please let me do this for Jesus’ sake.”

He pleaded not to be robbed of the privilege of doing it for God’s glory – and so they had to leave him to it.

**1 Corinthians 10 verse 31** “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

**Colossians 3 verse 17** “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

**Romans 12 verse 11** “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.”

How does Martha score?

I want you to imagine that we are back in “Come dine with me” – and for this dinner party let us pretend that Martha was the host.

Q. So how are we going to score her hosting?

## 2] Lazarus

Before we head on to look at Mary, who very much steals the show with her act of devotion – I want us to look briefly at the brother, at Lazarus.

Now one thing is interesting to note about Lazarus – and that is that we have absolutely no recorded words of his in Scripture.

However, what we do observe is that because of seeing Lazarus many people were putting their faith in Jesus.

**Samuel Chadwick** was a Methodist minister early in the last century:

“If God is at work week by week raising men from the dead, there will always be people coming to see how it is done. You cannot find an empty church that has conversion as its leading feature.

Do you want to know how to fill empty chapels? Here is the answer: **Get your Lazarus.**”

His point is a good one and it is simply that:

- there is nothing more convincing
- there is nothing more persuasive – when it comes to people coming to faith – than seeing CHANGED PEOPLE.

Now obviously I am not suggesting that Lazarus never opened his mouth and gave a verbal testimony – but we should remember that WITNESSING is at least a two-fold activity:

- we witness with our words
- we witness with our changed and transformed lives

As the old saying goes – “it’s better felt than told”

Acts chapter 1 (along with all the final chapters in the 4 gospels) gives us a statement of our commission as Christian believers.

Acts 1 verse 8 says “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will **BE my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

We are to have BOTH:

- the **FUNCTION** of a WITNESS
- AND the **FORM** of a WITNESS i.e. we look like someone who has undergone a rather distinct change

Lazarus – happy to be EXHIBIT A

I feel certain that while Jesus was in the house – Lazarus did not feel under any compulsion to speak. I think he would have been very happy to simply serve in the capacity of EXHIBIT A – should anybody care to check out the reality of all that Jesus was saying.

Simon the Leper – EXHIBIT B?

Now before we simply assume that Lazarus was the only exhibit present at this meal in Jesus’ honour – we should factor in something that BOTH Matthew and Mark tells us – and that is the fact that this meal is being hosted at the house of a man called Simon the Leper.

Now I think that should give us pause to think – because clearly, unless this house only used to be occupied by Simon before he got leprosy, it implies that now Simon has been cured – and that presumably by Jesus.

So very possibly there are two and not just one EXHIBIT to Jesus’ great power.

The Church’s greatest need

If you were asked what was perhaps one of the greatest needs that the church in the West had – perhaps one good answer might be to find themselves a LAZARUS.

I guess that that should be something that we put on our prayer lists.

Regarding prayer

As an aside – while on the subject of **prayer** and given we have just mentioned **Samuel Chadwick** – one of his most famous quotes is this one (which is always worth remembering):

“The one concern of the devil is to **keep Christians from praying**.  
He fears nothing from **prayerless** studies, **prayerless** work, and **prayerless** religion.  
He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, **but trembles when we pray.**”

How does Lazarus score?

Back once more to “Come dine with me” – and now let’s pretend that this was Lazarus’ turn to host.

Q. How will we score him? Q. Which will be his uppermost criteria?

I want now to turn for the rest of our time to Mary, #3 then and:

### 3] Mary

Looking through the little window that the Bible gives us into Mary of Bethany (because of course there were various other Mary’s and we shouldn’t get them all mixed up) – what we discover is that **WHENEVER WE SEE HER – SHE IS AT THE FEET OF JESUS:**

- Luke 10 verse 39 referring to Martha says: “She had a sister called Mary, **who sat at the Lord’s feet** listening to what he said.”
- John 11 verse 32 “When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, **she fell at his feet** and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’”

Interesting to note that even though Mary’s words are verbatim the same as those of Martha – we do not read that Martha throws herself down at Jesus’ feet.

- then there is this passage John 12 verse 3 “Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; **she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair**. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Mary has a heart of worship

What is very evident, and Jesus knows this, is that Mary has a **delightful** and **precious HEART OF WORSHIP**.

I think the order is important:

- before you can sit at his feet in worship
- you have to sit at his feet and learn

Q. Why the order? Q. Can’t you just worship as something rather spontaneous?

Well yes – worship can be spontaneous – but you don’t normally get something out of nothing.

The heart overflows in worship precisely because it has FIRST been filled with wonderful truth from Jesus’ lips.

Song of Solomon

How much Mary loved the Lord. I wonder whether she had in her mind the words that come early on in the book of the Song of Solomon (chapter 1 and verse 12). Words from the beloved to her lover:

“While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.”

### The perfume itself

The perfume we are told is called Nard and this was derived from the root and shoots of a plant that grew high up in the Himalayas in the Northern-most reaches of India. And so it is not so surprising that this particular perfume was very very expensive.

Verse 5 tells us about Judas’ objection “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? **It was worth a year’s wages.**”

The original Greek text says it was worth 300 denarii – the NIV has replaced this with an interpretation on the basis that people wouldn’t really understand how much that was. The average day’s wage was a denarius a day and so essentially we have a years wage.

So for our money it was to the tune of say £25,000. When you think of it in these terms it really starts to dawn upon you with somewhat more force the sheer EXTRAVAGANCE of Mary’s action.

Another word that you might well put alongside this action of Mary was SCANDALOUS. The reaction of various others in the party was that there was quite some OUTRAGE.

This is what we read in Mark’s account:

(Mark 14 verses 4-5) “Some of those present were saying **indignantly** to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they **rebuked her harshly.**”

The word used at the end of the sentence for “rebuked her harshly” – is the very same word that described Jesus’ reaction to Lazarus being in the tomb and the very destructiveness and waste that death brings in its wake. It is a word that describes something like the snorting of a horse.

Whatever might have started off as a very homely dinner party certainly now had an ingredient in it which was about the equivalent of setting off a firework inside the house. The cat was now very definitely amongst the pigeons.

### More scandal than just the perfume

It is worth pointing out that there is, in fact, more scandal than just the incredibly excessive use of this pint of pure nard.

I am referring to the fact that Mary uses her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet:

- now for us, we notice this fact because it seems rather STRANGE.

It is just weird. Q. Who would have thought of such a thing, whose ever seen someone do something like that?

So for us, in our culture, this is STRANGE, this is STARTLING.

- trying to enter into 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism – for a woman to let down her hair in public was reserved for those who had unashamed loose morals.

The equivalent in our day might be those who deliberately choose to wear very skimpy mini-skirts.

Q. I wonder what you would have thought of Mary?

Q. I am very curious to know what Martha said to herself as, perhaps, she came in from the kitchen with another tray of meat, just to be greeted by a literal WALL OF PERFUME and the SIGHT OF HER SISTER – “HAIR DOWN” at Jesus feet?

I wonder whether she was disgusted OR whether she more closely chimed in with Jesus’ response:

Mark 14 verse 6ff “‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? **She has done a beautiful thing to me.** The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.’”

#### David’s extravagant worship

I think if Mary had lived in OT times then should probably would have made a good soul-mate for King David.

Remember that signal occasion when the Ark of the Covenant was being moved into Jerusalem and David is worshipping the Lord EXTRAVAGANTLY.

This is what R Kent Hughes says in his book on worship: (“Worship by the book”)

“We must leave room in our lives for such humbling extravagance if God so inclines our hearts. As **King David** said... ‘I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes’ (2 Sam 6v21b-22)  
Worship demands all our affections. It calls for passionate devotion.  
(Then he quotes a poem by Wordsworth saying “**Heaven regrets the lore [that is L O R E] of nicely calculated less and more”.**)

#### Less becomes more

It is interesting how God takes the little we have – even if that is perhaps some prized heirloom (and we don’t know if this bottle of Nard was perhaps her dowry that she would have given to some future bridegroom) and how God can make even more of it than we might imagine.

There are two ways in which Mary’s astonishing sacrifice is very much MULTIPLIED:

- **FIRSTLY** – in terms of it’s **SIGNIFICANCE** – Jesus’ says:

“It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.”

Now I don’t know whether Mary had somehow come to understand what none of the other disciples had, that Jesus was shortly going to his death.

It is interesting that Mary of Bethany is nowhere recorded amongst the various women around the cross and at the tomb on that Resurrection morning.

Very possibly, her act is simply gaining more meaning than that which she originally had in her mind alone.

- **SECONDLY** – in terms of **REWARD** – Mary could have had little inkling that what she was about to do would end up as her **INDELIBLE LEGACY** through all generations.

As Jesus says: (Mark 14 verse 9):

“I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

## CONCLUSION

Let us remember that although much of this passage this morning revolves around Mary and her beautiful act – we need to see that she was **\*NOT\*** the only one with a fragrant offering.

Going full circle to where we began – Q. What special ingredient did each of our three hosts bring to the table?

For Martha – She majors in the **SERVICE OF THE LORD**:

- she loves to labour for him
- she spares no sweat in her service to him

What of Lazarus – He majors in his **WITNESS TO THE LORD**:

- truly a great **EXHIBIT** for the Lord
- truly an asset in the Lord’s hand

And Mary – She comes out strong in the **WORSHIP DEPARTMENT**:

- she is full-on, unashamed, no holds barred
- for her nothing is too expensive to give up for the Lord

Do you not think that when you add up these 3 – you have the 3 basic qualities of every Christian:

- **WORKING** for the Lord
- **WITNESSING** for the Lord
- **WORSHIPPING** the Lord

Q. So where are you in the midst of this scene?

- Labouring OR lounging
- Worshipping OR whingeing
- Evidencing changed lives OR evidencing that nothing much changes here

**Let us pray that we would each one of us know that we comfortably fit the**

**NORMATIVE NT MODEL of Working for Jesus/Witnessing for Jesus & truly Worshipping the Lord Jesus. A M E N**